AGRICULTURAL LAND

Edmonton Metropolitan
Regional Planning Commission

EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

B. HEWES
CHAIRMAN

R.N.GIFFEN M.C.I.P.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Baker Centre
602 - 10025 - 106 Street
EDMONTON ALBERTA
T5J 1G4

PHONE 423-5701

OUR FILE .....

YOUR FILE .....

November, 1983

Mr. Charles Stewart
Panel Chairman, Agricultural Hearings
Environment Council of Alberta
8th Floor, Weber Centre
5555 Calgary Trail
EDMONTON, Alberta
T6H 5P9

Dear Mr. Stewart:

RE: **Agricultural Land, A Report Prepared for the Environment Council of Alberta Public Hearings on Maintaining and Expanding the Agricultural Land Base in Alberta**

It is my pleasure to present this report to the Environment Council of Alberta. Maintaining an agricultural land base is an issue that has been continually brought before the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission for its decision and action. Our experience over the years, has led to a number of practices, policies and plans being adopted and implemented, and it is within the context of this experience that our report has been prepared for your consideration.

I would like to thank the Environment Council of Alberta for the opportunity to present this report at a public hearing. We hope that the conclusions and recommendations contained herein, will assist you in establishing a course of action for the long term maintenance of this valuable resource.

Yours truly,

R. N. Giffen
Executive Director

RNG/ig

Attachment

AGRICULTURAL LAND

A Report Prepared for the Environment Council of Alberta Public Hearings on Maintaining and Expanding the Agricultural Land Base in Alberta

Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission
#602 - 10025-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5J 1G4

November, 1983

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL		i
TITLE PAGE		ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS		iii
LIST OF TABLES		iv
LIST OF MAPS		iv
PREFACE		1
1.0	**INTRODUCTION**	3
	1.1 Overview	3
	1.2 A Description of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region	5
	Population Pattern of Non-Agricultural Development Agriculture	
2.0	**AN OVERVIEW OF COMMISSION PRACTICE RESPECTING THE MAINTENANCE OF AN AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE**	9
	Introduction History of Commission Practice Proposed Regional Plan Proposed Agricultural Policies	
3.0	**ISSUES CONCERNING THE EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION**	15
	3.1 The Conversion and Loss of Agricultural Land	15
	3.1.1 Past Losses in the Edmonton Region	15
	3.1.2 Identification of Agricultural Lands	16
	3.2 The Conflicts that Affect Agricultural Land	20
	3.3 The Future of Agricultural Land	22
4.0	**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**	25
REFERENCES		29

APPENDICES

Appendix A Land Use Information and Population Capacity Statistics, E.M.R.P.C. Region

Appendix B Comments Received in Response to the 1979 and 1982 Draft Regional Plans Regarding Agriculture

Appendix C Proposed Regional Plan Policies

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
TABLE 1	General Comparison of Population of E.M.R.P.C. Region 1961-1981.....	6
TABLE 2	Estimated Generalized Land Use - E.M.R.P.C. Region.....	6
TABLE 3	Employment Structure, Census Metropolitan Area....	23

LIST OF MAPS

		After Page
MAP 1	Provincial Setting.....	6
MAP 2	E.M.R.P.C. Planning Region.....	6
MAP 3	Agricultural Capability and Generalized Land Use, 1961.....	16
MAP 4	Agricultural Capability and Generalized Land Use, 1983.....	16

PREFACE

This paper has been prepared by the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission (E.M.R.P.C.) in response to the Environment Council of Alberta's (E.C.A.) invitation to participate in public hearings on Maintaining and Expanding the Agricultural Land Base in Alberta. The Commission recognizes that these hearings will address a wide spectrum of issues related to the topic of maintaining and expanding the agricultural land base, however, this presentation will be restricted to Point 1.d. of the Terms of Reference for these public hearings:

> The Environment Council of Alberta is hereby requested to:
>
> 1. Enquire into means for maintaining and expanding the Alberta agricultural land base and for maximizing its production. The enquiry will address issues related to:
>
> d. the potential effects of urban growth, industrial development and the land requirements of pipelines, powerlines, roads and airports on our agricultural land base.

Because the Commission is closely involved in the land use planning of urban and rural land, and has been since its formation as a land use planning agency in 1950, we believe we can make a most positive contribution to the hearings on this topic.

In addition to discussing the issues common to the ten Regional Planning Commissions in the Province, this paper describes the concerns related to the metropolitan character of this region. Finally, it is the intention of this paper to provide recommendations which would aid in maintaining the agricultural land base in Alberta.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Agricultural land is a finite resource. From a provincial perspective, the concept of conserving agricultural land should be seen as being synonymous with the longer term production of food.

It is this type of philosophy that has underlain the decisions of the E.M.R.P.C. (and its predecessors, the E.D.P.C. and E.R.P.C.)[1] over the past thirty-three years. However, experience over the years has shown that the practical application of this philosophical approach often encounters unforeseen difficulties. Some of these difficulties have arisen because the E.M.R.P.C., as a land use planning agency operating primarily at the regional level, does not have complete jurisdiction over activities which have major impacts on the use of agricultural land in the region. Annexation and subdivision appeals are two examples where a regional strategy on maintaining the agricultural land base may be affected by decisions beyond the Commission's control.

National, provincial and local municipal concerns further complicate regional land use planning decisions. The Federal Government has land use jurisdiction over all federal crown lands, including airports and Indian reserves. The Provincial Government, through the Planning Act administered by Alberta Municipal Affairs and a number of Acts administered by a number of other government departments, has direct control over, or greatly influences land use on agricultural land in Alberta. Subdivision

---

[1] E.D.P.C. - Edmonton District Planning Commission - 1950-1963.
E.R.P.C. - Edmonton Regional Planning Commission - 1963-1981.

> "Every statutory plan, replotting scheme and land use bylaw, every action taken or thing done by a local authority, regional planning commission or a council and every decision of a municipal planning commission, joint municipal planning commission, development appeal board or development officer shall conform with the regional plan."

It is within this planning framework that the following paper has been prepared. A description of the agricultural and non-agricultural activities of the Region is followed by a discussion of past and present E.M.R.P.C. practices regarding the use of agricultural land, and a discussion of the issues related to the maintenance of an agricultural land base, as viewed by the Commission. The paper concludes with recommendations which the Commission believes will assist the Council to come to a conclusive decision regarding the future of agricultural land in this Province.

1.2 A Description of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region

Population

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region[3] has experienced major changes in population growth and distribution during the past two decades. The rapid rate of growth, from 378,000 in 1961 to 716,000 in 1981 (see Table 1), has been accompanied by shifts in the distribution of people from the City of Edmonton to communities outside the City. After a general decline in the 1960's the rural population has increased, primarily as a result of country residential development, and now constitutes about 8 percent of the Metropolitan Region's population.

---

[3] See Map 1 for the provincial setting of the E.M.R.P.C. Region.

appeals, annexations and subdivision approvals where no Regional Planning Commission or local municipal subdivision approving authority exists, would fall into this latter category.

The Planning Act requires that each regional planning commission prepare and adopt a regional plan for its planning region.[2] The Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan represents the completion of an important phase of this mandate. This Regional Plan addresses current issues and guides long term future land use and development in the Region beyond the turn of the century.

The Plan establishes a framework for inter-municipal and local planning which will coordinate the statutory plans of the Region's municipalities. The Plan also provides a basis for inter-governmental cooperation and coordination on matters of regional development and resource conservation.

In addition to preparing regional plans, Regional Planning Commissions serve as subdivision approving authorities in all cases where the local municipality does not have such authority.

Local municipal land use policies provide for the site specific, day to day decisions regarding the use of agricultural land. Local plans must conform to the Regional Plan. The local policies must be in accord with Section 54(2) of the Planning Act which states:

---

2 Each regional planning commission shall, on or before December 31, 1982 adopt a plan for the planning region under its jurisdiction in accordance with this Act which shall be known as the "(Name of Region)" Regional Plan.

> "Every statutory plan, replotting scheme and land use bylaw, every action taken or thing done by a local authority, regional planning commission or a council and every decision of a municipal planning commission, joint municipal planning commission, development appeal board or development officer shall conform with the regional plan."

It is within this planning framework that the following paper has been prepared. A description of the agricultural and non-agricultural activities of the Region is followed by a discussion of past and present E.M.R.P.C. practices regarding the use of agricultural land, and a discussion of the issues related to the maintenance of an agricultural land base, as viewed by the Commission. The paper concludes with recommendations which the Commission believes will assist the Council to come to a conclusive decision regarding the future of agricultural land in this Province.

1.2 A Description of the Edmonton Metropolitan Region

Population

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region[3] has experienced major changes in population growth and distribution during the past two decades. The rapid rate of growth, from 378,000 in 1961 to 716,000 in 1981 (see Table 1), has been accompanied by shifts in the distribution of people from the City of Edmonton to communities outside the City. After a general decline in the 1960's the rural population has increased, primarily as a result of country residential development, and now constitutes about 8 percent of the Metropolitan Region's population.

---

[3] See Map 1 for the provincial setting of the E.M.R.P.C. Region.

TABLE 1

GENERAL COMPARISON OF POPULATION OF E.M.R.P.C. REGION, 1961-1981

Population	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981
Total E.M.R.P.C. Region	377,997	443,564	519,698	596,022	716,101
Total Urban	340,141	407,279	485,777	549,713	652,538
Edmonton Only	320,598	376,926	438,155	471,474	532,246
Rural	37,856	36,285	33,921	46,309	63,563
PERCENTAGE OF E.M.R.P.C. REGION					
Total Urban	90.0	91.8	93.5	92.2	91.1
Edmonton	84.0	85.0	84.3	79.1	74.3
Rural	10.0	8.2	6.5	7.8	8.9

Source: E.M.R.P.C. Files.

TABLE 2

ESTIMATED GENERALIZED LAND USE - E.M.R.P.C. REGION
Area in hectares (% of total area)

Use	1961 Hectares	%	1971 Hectares	%	1983 Hectares	%
Agricultural/Rural[a]	614,598	(92.1)	593,500	(89.0)	522,086	(78.3)
Urban[b]	19,000	(2.9)	34,780	(5.1)	84,923	(12.7)
Country Residential	684	(-)	5,820	(0.9)	24,371	(3.6)
Industrial	-	(-)	-	(-)	2,120	(0.3)
Federal Lands	17,900	(2.7)	17,900	(2.7)	18,500	(2.8)
Waterbodies	15,000	(2.3)	15,000	(2.3)	15,000	(2.3)
TOTAL	667,000	(100.0)	667,000	(100.0)	667,000	(100.0)

Source: E.M.R.P.C. Files and Statistics Canada.

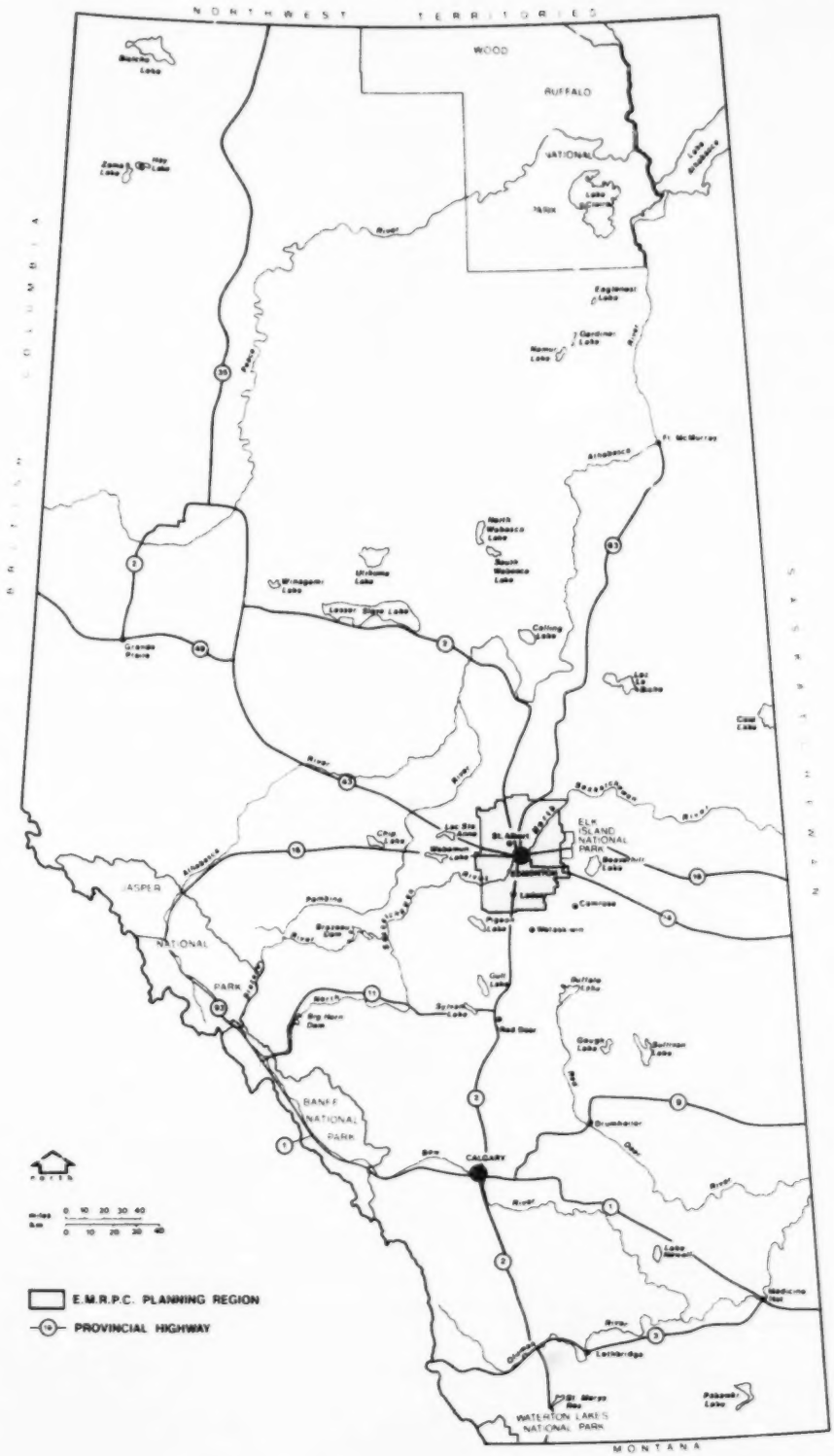
NOTE: See Appendix A for more information.

[a] Agricultural/Rural also includes all non-agricultural uses other than country residential and industrial uses.

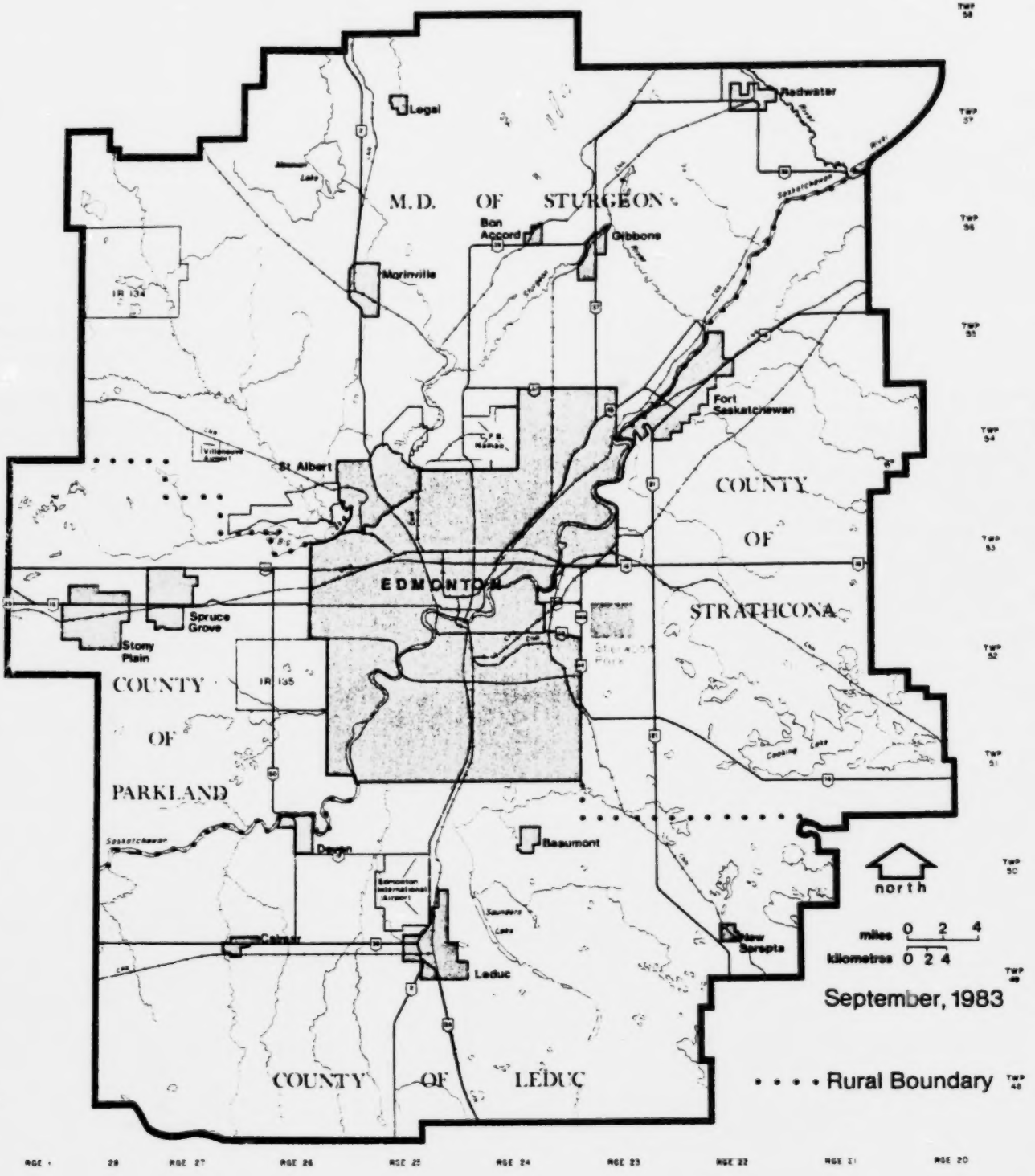
[b] Urban refers to the entire area within the boundaries of the urban municipality and includes all uses within that municipality including agriculture.

REGIONAL SETTING

MAP 1



E.M.R.P.C. PLANNING REGION



MAP 2

Pattern of Non-Agricultural Development

The Region consists of a compact metropolitan-urban structure dominated by the City of Edmonton. Edmonton is the primary location of employment, and major social, cultural, educational, and institutional facilities. Fifteen other urban communities are dispersed throughout the Region (See Map 2).

The rural population is concentrated in country residential subdivisions and in the hamlets throughout the Region. The largest nodes of country residential development are found in the County of Strathcona (southeast of Sherwood Park) and in the County of Parkland (near Devon and north of Stony Plain).

Industrial development occupies 2,120 hectares (5,239 acres) of the existing rural land base of the Region. Major industrial land use concentrations in rural municipalities are located in the following areas:

(1) in the County of Strathcona, east of Edmonton;

(2) in the County of Leduc, north of the City of Leduc;

(3) the Scotford area in the County of Strathcona to the northeast of Fort Saskatchewan; and

(4) in the County of Parkland immediately west of the City of Edmonton.

The population growth of the Region and the accompanying land use requirements have resulted in a noticeable shift to a more urbanized Region with more non-agricultural land uses on agricultural land (see Table 2).

Agriculture

As far as agricultural land use is concerned, the Edmonton Metropolitan Region is highly suited to agriculture - hence, the most extensive use in the Region continues to be farming. The majority of the soils are productive for agriculture and support a diversity of crops. Approximately 65% or 433,500 hectares of the soils in the Region are rated as Class 1, 2 or 3 for agricultural production by the Canada Land Inventory. An additional 15% or 100,000 hectares are rated as Class 4. A short growing season and physical deficiencies in the soil structure are the common constraints to agricultural productivity, however, these constraints are considered minor and affect relatively small areas of the Region.

The Edmonton Metropolitan Region supports a wide range of agricultural activities. The generally favourable physical and climatic features, and the urbanized nature of the Region have generated a number of specialized activities, such as dairy farming, market gardening, and sod farming, along with the more widespread activities of grain farming, intensive livestock operations and mixed farming.

2.0 AN OVERVIEW OF COMMISSION PRACTICE RESPECTING THE MAINTENANCE OF AN AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE

Introduction

The Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission believes it is important to summarize for the Environment Council of Alberta the evolution of Commission policies related to agriculture to ensure that the Council understands the effort and commitment this Commission has made to protect the agricultural viability of the Region. In addition, the Commission wishes to bring to the Council's attention that, although the basic issues and concerns related to agriculture in this Region are common to the entire province, the highly urbanized nature of the E.M.R.P.C. Region renders them more complex than might be the case in less urbanized, less populated areas.

History of Commission Practice

The underlying philosophy of the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission is, and always has been, one of ensuring the continued viability of agriculture in the Region. As early as 1954 the Commission developed an agricultural policy which, at that time, seemed appropriate. In accordance with the Veterans Land Act the policy encouraged the subdivision of high quality agricultural land into smaller parcels to allow war veterans to subsidize their income by growing agricultural products. Over time a concern emerged that this policy encouraged the use of high quality agricultural land more for purely residential purposes rather than agriculture. The policy was reconsidered and revised in 1960 to encourage the location of smaller parcels only on poorer agricultural soils.

In response to amendments to the Planning Act in 1957, giving regional planning commissions authority to prepare and adopt a regional plan, the Commission adopted on January 8, 1958 the Preliminary District Plan - Metropolitan Section. The plan was primarily a land use control document intended to ensure orderly and economical development in the metropolitan area by controlling and coordinating the use of land. Although subsequently amended on numerous occasions, the broad principles of the 1958 plan remain largely intact and form the basis of the Regional Plan: Metropolitan Part currently in effect. This plan has sought to maintain compact urban communities and industrial areas, prevent unwarranted fragmentation of good agricultural land and has established a continuous natural open space system along the North Saskatchewan River Valley and tributary ravines. Portions of the Sturgeon River Valley and Big Lake shoreline in the metropolitan area are also included in the open space system.

Proposed Regional Plan

The preparation of the Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan has evolved through a number of stages. Between 1975 and 1978, a series of policy position papers were published, the first of which was devoted to rural land use. A wide range of technical research was undertaken and a growth alternatives study was conducted which included extensive public participation and an evaluation of a number of growth alternatives.

In February, 1979 a Draft Edmonton Regional Plan was circulated for public comment. Information meetings and public hearings were held and were followed by an intensive review of the issues and concerns raised. This resulted in a re-write of the Plan. However in May 1981, the Commission suspended further work on this Plan because of the pending Edmonton annexation decision.

Subsequently, the regional plan program was adjusted and modified because of events pertaining to the Edmonton annexation decision, the re-structuring of the Commission, the Provincial Cabinet directives respecting growth management for the Edmonton Region and the release of the Alberta Planning Board's guidelines for Regional Plan preparation. This work, which commenced in 1982, necessitated additional technical research and a complete review of the objectives and policies of the previous draft plan and the preparation of new objectives and policies to reflect changing circumstances.

In accordance with the Planning Act, the Proposed Regional Plan draft was circulated, in January 1983, to each municipal council and local authority in the Region, to the Alberta Planning Board, to provincial government departments, and was also made available to the public, for review and comment.

In order to facilitate the exchange of information and views, information meetings and public hearings were held throughout the Region in the early part of 1983. This review generated significant response and these responses have been used as a basis for the preparation of this Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan.[4] As a consequence of this review the Proposed Regional Plan draft was extensively revised, and a Proposed Regional Plan, more in keeping with the wishes of the Region's municipal councils and the intent of the guidelines of the Alberta Planning Board, was produced.

---

[4] See Appendix B for summary of responses related to agricultural land use in the Region.

At its July 4, 1983 meeting, the Commission gave notice to all local authorities in the Region of the Commission's intention to consider adoption of the Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan, as revised. Following circulation and consideration of further comments received this Proposed Regional Plan was adopted unanimously by the Commission at its meeting on September 7, 1983 and subsequently submitted to the Alberta Planning Board for approval and ministerial ratification.

Proposed Agriculture Policies

The Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission recognizes the vital role of agriculture in the region and has formulated Regional Plan Policies to ensure the protection of the agricultural land base. The primary focus of these policies is to protect the higher capability agricultural lands. In addition, the policies in the Proposed Regional Plan accommodate non-agricultural uses on agricultural land, but only where deemed appropriate by the local municipality and the Commission, and maintain agricultural productivity by striving to minimize land use conflicts between agriculture and other land uses. Appendix C contains all Proposed Regional Plan policies related to agriculture.

The most significant of the agricultural policies of the Proposed Regional Plan require that rural municipalities identify and protect better agricultural land as defined in the Plan and that all muncipalities limit non-agricultural uses on that land. Such policies ensure the preservation of the land base.

Another proposed Regional Plan policy requires all subdivision approving authorities to prohibit multiple parcel country residential development on better agricultural land except for minor infilling of existing subdivided areas. This policy not only serves to reduce the loss of the agricultural land base but also minimizes conflicts between agricultural use and country residential use which affect agricultural productivity.

The intention of the fourth agricultural policy in the Proposed Regional Plan is to maintain the agricultural integrity of high quality agricultural areas by maintaining a minimum parcel size of 160 acres. Exceptions to this policy allow for a single parcel out and an 80 acre split or the separation of physically severed parcels. These exceptions permit flexibility in decision making and protect the right of the individual to subdivide part of his holdings.

The remaining agricultural policies recognize the significance of intensive agricultural activities in the Region and promote the formulation of detailed policies by local municipalities to ensure conflicts between intensive agricultural activities and other uses are kept to a minimum.

Policies to protect the agricultural land base from premature conversion to other specific land uses have been formulated in other sections of the Proposed Regional Plan. The Commission acknowledges the presence of large areas of agricultural land in the Region's urban municipalities (e.g. Edmonton, Stony Plain). Proposed Regional Plan policy requires the urban municipalities to identify and protect the better agricultural land until such time as the land is required for urban development. Such a policy strives to maintain the productivity of agricultural lands in urban municipalities as long as possible.

The E.M.R.P.C. recognizes that significant land use pressures occur in the fringe areas of urban municipalities. The Proposed Regional Plan strongly promotes joint planning for these areas and requires a joint plan to ensure that premature conversion of agricultural land is avoided.

Other Proposed Regional Plan policies encourage municipalities to direct activities, such as hamlet growth, industrial use and transportation and utility facilities, away from better agricultural land. Also, Proposed Regional Plan policy states that local municipalities should require better agricultural land, which is disturbed by extractive resource operations, be reclaimed to an agricultural land capability comparable to or greater than that which existed prior to extraction.

The implementation of the policies of the plan will depend on the cooperative efforts of all the participants in the planning process and, in particular, upon a continued coordinated approach involving municipal and provincial levels of government and the Commission. For its part in working towards the successful implementation and ongoing effectiveness of the Regional Plan, the Commission will undertake monitoring programs to facilitate the continuous evaluation and refinement of policies in response to changing conditions. From time to time it will also be necessary to review the Plan, in whole or in part, and to amend it as the Commission considers appropriate.

3.0 ISSUES CONCERNING THE EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

For discussion purposes, three key issues have been identified. These issues are based upon the experience the Commission has gained, over the years, in dealing with agricultural land. They are:

(1) the conversion and loss of agricultural land;
(2) the conflicts that affect agricultural land; and
(3) the future of agricultural land.

3.1 The Conversion and Loss of Agricultural Land

The change from agricultural to non-agricultural land use in the Edmonton Region, and indeed in the Province and Canada as a whole, is identified as the major impetus behind these hearings. The E.M.R.P.C. has attempted to approach this issue from a somewhat different perspective by not only concentrating upon statistics and information related to past losses, but also presenting ideas orientated to future action.

3.1.1 Past Losses In the Edmonton Region

Table 2 outlines generalized land use in the E.M.R.P.C. Region for the years 1961, 1971 and 1983. Five land use/natural feature categories are shown. As indicated, the agricultural/rural category has decreased from 92.1% in 1961 to 78.6% in 1983. Expressed as to actual area, this is a decrease from 615,600 hectares to 522,100 hectares over the 22 year period. During the same period, the urban category rose from 2.9% (19,000 hectares) in 1961, to 12.7% (84,900 hectares) in 1983.

Maps 3 and 4 show the amount of agricultural land in the E.M.R.P.C. Planning Region (C.L.I. Agricultural Capability) and the relationship that exists between urban, country residential and industrial land uses in the years 1961 and 1983 respectively. Maps 3 and 4 and Table 2 must be qualified by the observation that not all lands transferred from the agricultural/rural category have been immediately removed from agricultural use. However, their longer term conversion to other uses is deemed inevitable.

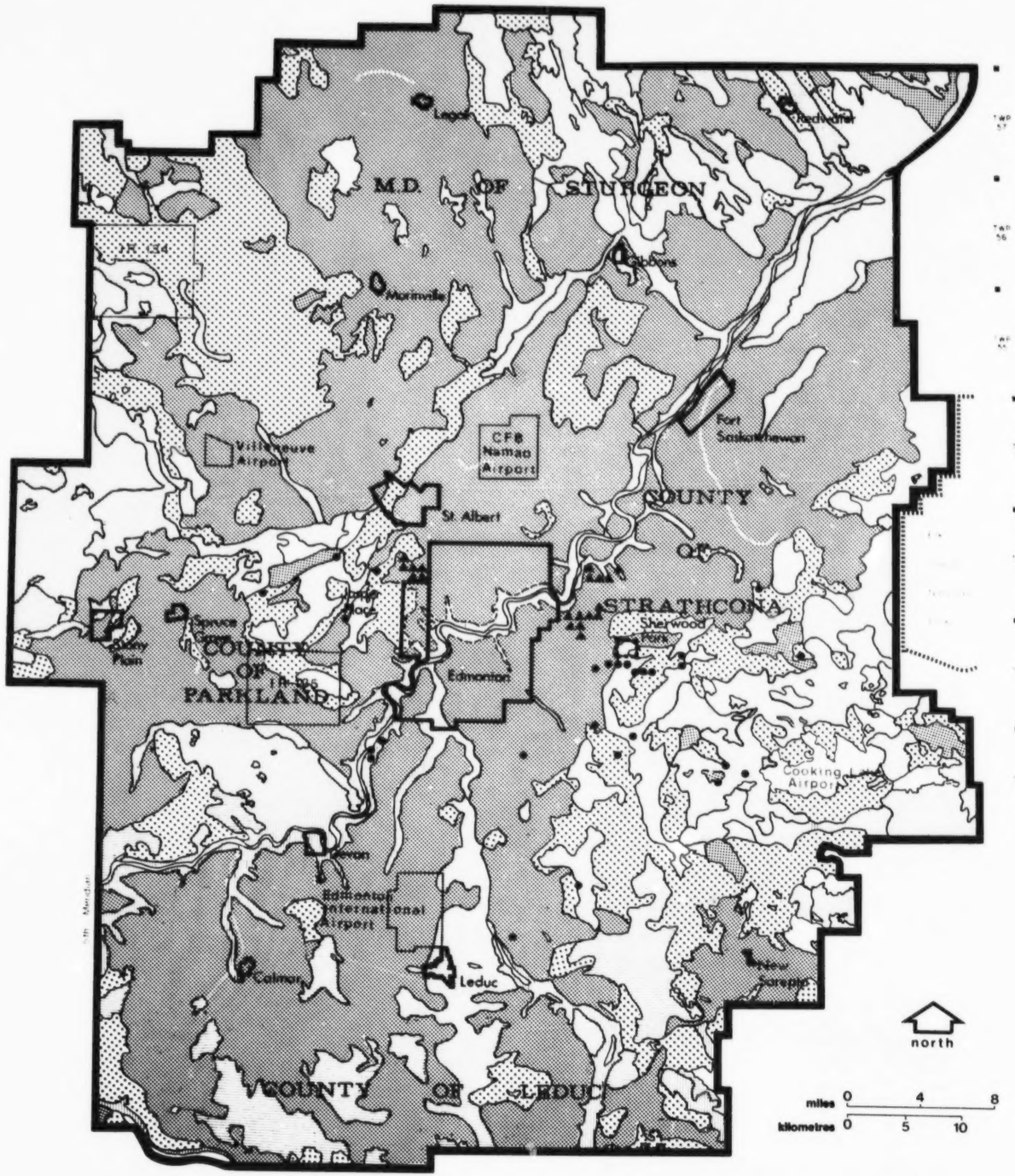
3.1.2 Identification of Agricultural Lands

Agricultural land is constantly being converted to other uses. But what are the reasons behind this loss? And are there lessons to be learned from past experience?

Sub-issues arising from the E.M.R.P.C.'s past experience relate to the lack of a consistent definition of agricultural land and the absence of a workable strategy that can be implemented at Provincial, Regional and Municipal levels. The E.M.R.P.C. has defined better agricultural land in the Proposed Regional Plan.[5] The present definition and supporting policy statements are based upon the experience gained by the Commission over the years as it has sought to preserve good agricultural land. However, this achievement could have been even more successful, if there had been a commonly agreed upon strategy applicable throughout all levels of government.

---

5 "Better agricultural land", as defined in the Proposed Regional Plan - all land with a Canada Land Inventory rating of 1 and 2, and those lands rated as 3 where the farmland assessment rating is 41% or higher and, at the discretion of a rural municipality, may include other cultivated or improved lands.



MAP 3

AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY AND GENERALIZED LAND USE: 1961

AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY

- Class 1-2
- Class 3
- Class 4
- Class 5-6-7 & Organic Soils
- Unclassified
- E.M.R.P.C. Boundary, 1983 *

GENERALIZED LAND USE

- Urban Municipality
- Country Residential (5 parcels or more / quarter section)
- Industrial-Rural Areas (Illustrated / quarter section)

* NOTE: 1961 Boundary not shown.

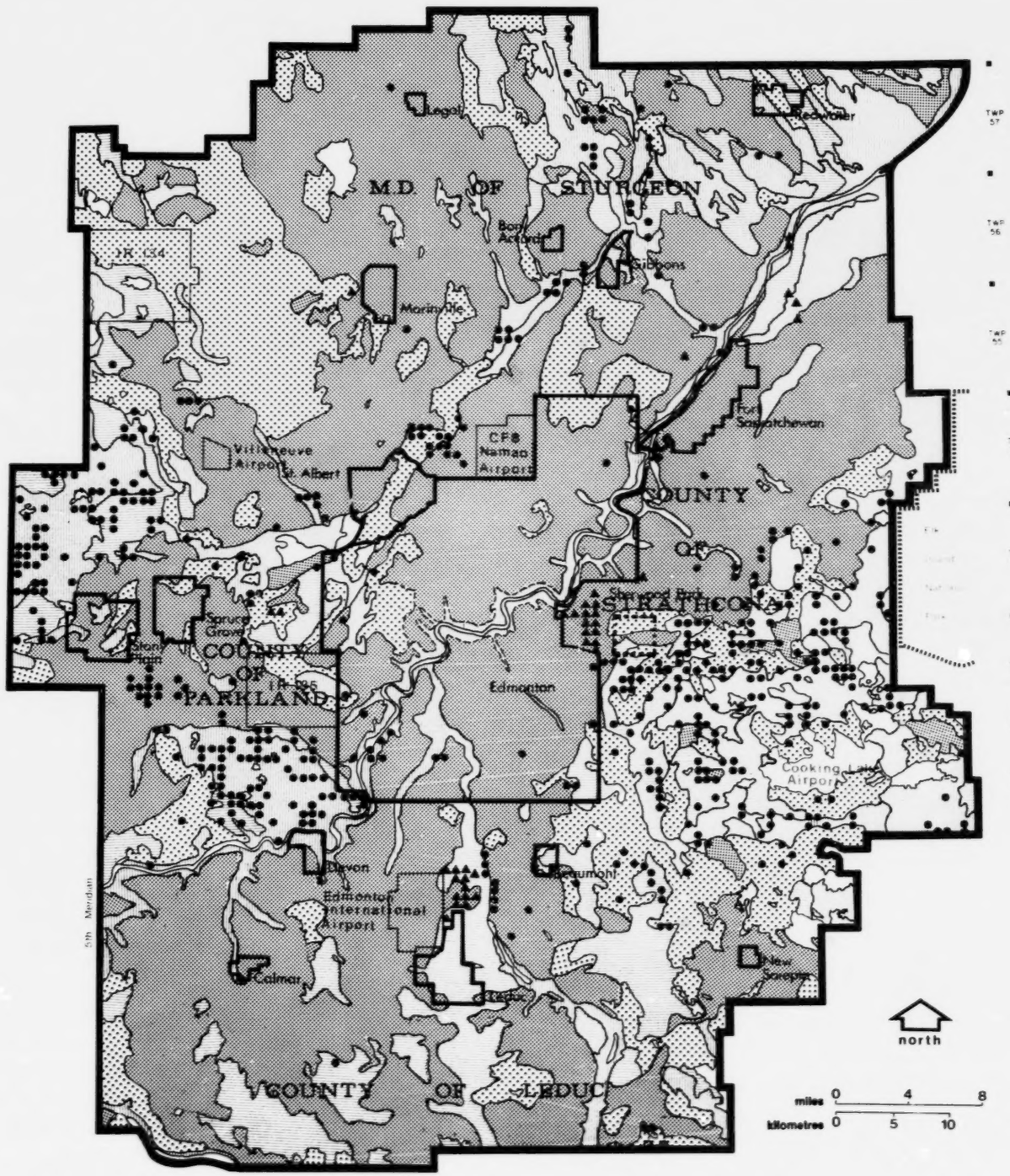
SOURCE: Canada Land Inventory Classification & E.M.R.P.C. Files.

Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission

RGE 1 · 28 · RGE 27 · RGE 26 · RGE 25 · RGE 24 · RGE 23 · RGE 22 · RGE 21 · RGE 20

MAP 4

AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY AND GENERALIZED LAND USE: 1983



AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY

- Class 1-2
- Class 3
- Class 4
- Class 5-6-7 & Organic Soils
- Unclassified

E.M.R.P.C. Boundary, 1983

GENERALIZED LAND USE

- Urban Municipality
- Country Residential (5 parcels or more / quarter section)
- Industrial-Rural Areas (Illustrated / quarter section)

SOURCE: Canada Land Inventory Classification & E.M.R.P.C. Files.

Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission

RGE 2 RGE 1 28 RGE 27 RGE 26 RGE 25 RGE 24 RGE 23 RGE 22 RGE 21 RGE 20

TWP 57 TWP 56 TWP 55 TWP 54 TWP 53 TWP 52 TWP 51 TWP 50 TWP 49 TWP 48 TWP 47

Historically, lands with Canada Land Inventory (C.L.I.) rating for agriculture of 1, 2 and 3 were considered "prime agricultural lands". The current definition of "better agricultural land" has been formulated to reflect the following:

- classes 1 and 2 soils and the upper range of 3 are considered to be regionally significant but soils in the lower range of class 3 are not;

- there is allowance for greater flexibility (autonomy) at the local level, especially when the subdivision approving authority has been delegated to the local municipality; and,

- the quality of C.L.I. 3 land has continually been open to question and challenge, particularly when site specific plans are evaluated as in the case of applications for subdivision.

In this latter instance, the Alberta Planning Board mediates disputes. In the past, a few of the Alberta Planning Board decisions have appeared to adhere to a broader definition or philosophy of what constitutes agricultural land and, in the opinion of the Commission, may have resulted in the fragmentation of a high quality resource.

However, another factor that is often brought to the fore during subdivision appeals, is the *lack of specific soils information*. In most instances, the E.M.R.P.C. uses C.L.I. Maps which are designed for regional scale use. The interpretation of regional scale maps is quite naturally open to question at a more detailed level of

planning. Soils consultants, hired to evaluate the agricultural capability of a specific parcel of land, usually present a very objective and scientific assessment that often contradicts the more generalized C.L.I. information.

A second example of the apparent *lack of a common definition and strategy* occurs when annexation applications are evaluated by the Local Authorities Board. A final decision may recommend that land of high agricultural capability be annexed, even though the Regional Planning Commission and the affected municipalities may not support such a recommendation.[6]

The *policies and definitions of other Provincial Government Departments and agencies also vary.* Alberta Agriculture in its response to the E.M.R.P.C. draft Regional Plan offered very detailed recommendations for defining good agricultural land; recommendations which were more detailed in fact than the Commission's original definition. The Alberta Planning Board, responding to the same draft document, recommended that the E.M.R.P.C. definitions be "broadened and strengthened". The end result of these and other comments is the current E.M.R.P.C. definition. Although a relevant and operational definition exists at the Regional level, there appears to be no consistent definition and strategy that can also be applied at the Provincial and, to a lesser extent, the Municipal levels of government.

---

[6] The most recent City of Edmonton Annexation Application and the final Provincial Cabinet decision is a case in point. The City was granted high quality agricultural land (mostly C.L.I. 1 and 2) which was not part of their original submission to the Local Authorities Board.

Finally, *the individual who owns agricultural land cannot be ignored when addressing the conversion and loss issue.* Often individual landowners view the sale and conversion of their land to other uses as a right. The 'right to retirement' for example is a commonly cited argument in support of such action and one which has considerable credence when considered on an individual basis. But what is the long term future of agricultural land if every individual were to exercise this 'right'? Clearly, an overall strategy must be developed to allow retirement and still maintain the agricultural land base in the Province. Also, individuals have the responsibility to consider the long term viability of an agricultural community, rather than insisting upon short term and self-centred action. Recent pressures to include land ownership under the Charter of Rights may accelerate land conversions and draw even more attention to the urgency of the problem.

In summary, the conversion and loss of agricultural land is a Provincial, Regional, Municipal, as well as an individual responsibility and the proper identification of this resource, by all involved, is an imperative course of action.

The Provincial land resource is not only affected by different levels of government but is also composed of many different and varied regions. The following discussion of the conflicts that affect agricultural land stresses the idea of regional complexity and its effect upon the conversion and loss of agricultural land in the E.M.R.P.C. Planning Region.

3.2 The Conflicts that Affect Agricultural Land

An overly simplistic solution to the loss of high quality agricultural land in the Edmonton Region, would be to adhere strictly to a rigid definition that prohibits all future land use change on high quality agricultural land. Unfortunately, this 'carved in stone' approach is not always the ideal solution. *The E.M.R.P.C., for example, supports the concept of agricultural communities or blocks of agricultural land within the Region as a whole.* These areas will be composed almost entirely of high quality agricultural land and actively used for agricultural endeavours. Granted, small areas of lower quality soil will be contained within the larger communities, but in order to maintain agricultural viability these lower quality areas are considered to be part of the larger community and are therefore regarded as having a low land use change potential. The strict application of a rigid definition in this instance would permit land use change on the lower quality soils without assessing the negative environmental, social and economic impacts upon the surrounding agricultural community. Another example relates to the reverse situation where a small area of high quality agricultural land is located within, and almost completely surrounded by, industrial and urban land uses. The economic and social grounds for the change in land use in this situation may be very strong and the change itself may not have serious ramifications on the agricultural community or on overall agricultural productivity.

These examples naturally lead to the issue of *what constitutes an agricultural unit of land.* As outlined, viability is related to a number of factors including location, marketability and the type of agricultural activity. The E.M.R.P.C. has chosen the quarter section (160 acres) as a minimum sized agricultural unit.

However, in certain circumstances, 80 acre subdivisions may be permitted (see Appendix C for E.M.R.P.C. policies). Once again this standard, which is based upon considerable experience, discussion and debate, is often questioned and challenged by all involved.

Additional conflicts that affect agricultural land relate to economic and population growth projections and the resultant land use designations for future use. In the Edmonton Region, substantial tracts of high quality agricultural land have been designated in Statutory Plans and, in some instances, classified in Land Use Bylaws as future residential and industrial areas. Many of these designations were based upon the optimistic growth projections of the 1970's which have not materialized. Although in most cases these lands are maintained in agricultural use[7], their long term future is in question. Their artificially inflated value, due to designation and classification in plans and bylaws, creates additional pressure to sell. If these lands were to be purchased by large agri-businesses the longer term social and economic impact upon the local agricultural community is largely unknown.

In summary, there are many conflicts that affect agricultural lands in the E.M.R.P.C. Planning Region. These conflicts are often over-simplified by attempts to reduce every situation to a rigid definition of 'prime' or 'good' or 'better' agricultural land. The land use, environmental, social and economic interplay in a complex and dynamic Region, such as the Edmonton Region, requires more than the application of a rigid definition to main-

---

7 The present municipal assessment and taxation system encourages continued agricultural use, as the tax rate for agricultural land is much lower than the rates for lands assessed as industrial or residential.

tain agricultural viability. The system, as it operates at present, lacks clarity and consistency and, therefore begs serious questions regarding the future of agricultural land.

3.3 The Future of Agricultural Land

The Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan contains population growth projections that extend to the year 2006. In light of the recent economic down-turn in the Province, these projections may be overly optimistic, however only time will be the true witness of these projections. What remains constant during this period, is the necessity to produce food from the limited amount of agricultural land that is available. In addition, this agricultural land will be necessary for food production far beyond the twenty-five year time period. Agricultural land is a finite resource and not a commodity, and this fact forces planners to look beyond the immediate future. For example, if the growth projections contained in the E.M.R.P.C.'s Proposed Regional Plan were accurate, an additional 260,000 to 360,000 people over the next twenty years would take the Regional population from 740,000 to 1.1 million people. The amount of undeveloped land presently located within urban municipalities and country residential subdivisions in the Region should more than adequately accommodate these additional people. However, if this growth rate continues, what happens in 50 to 60 years? Clearly, the maintenance of an agricultural land base in the Province is a long term issue. Population growth merely accelerates the urgency of the issue.

The long term maintenance of agricultural land, when viewed from an economic perspective, is also a feasible approach. Although economic growth is not occurring at the present time, it is difficult to predict longer term trends.

For example, past statistics reveal that in 1961, 5.4% of the employment structure in the metropolitan area was involved in agriculture but by 1971 this figure had decreased to 2.8% and by 1981 was down to 1.1%. These figures generally indicate that agriculture decreased in importance and other industries, such as Community, Business and Personal Service, became more important during this time period (See Table 3).

TABLE 3

EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE, EDMONTON CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREA
(in percentages)*

INDUSTRIAL DIVISION	1961	1971	1981
Agriculture	5.4	2.8	1.1
Other Primary	2.6	2.1	2.6
Manufacturing	12.4	11.2	10.8
Construction	9.3	8.5	10.4
Transportation, Communication and Other Utilities	10.9	9.2	9.1
Trade	19.9	17.1	17.7
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	3.9	4.3	6.1
Community, Business and Personal Service	22.2	27.1	30.0
Public Administration and Defence	11.2	10.2	9.3
Unspecified	2.4	7.4	2.7

Source: Statistics Canada

* Actual figures not shown, percentages may be misleading as the number of people involved in agriculture declined only slightly over the 20 year period.

But what does the longer term future hold for agriculture and its relationship to the industrial employment structure of the Region? As with the accommodation of residential development, there is probably more than enough vacant industrial land to accommodate growth (if it occurs) over the next twenty years.

However, if the E.M.R.P.C.'s growth projections are correct and if the employment structure continues to evolve as it has during the past twenty years, the future of agricultural land may be in jeopardy, especially over the longer term horizon of 50 to 60 years. In all probability, the pressure to change agricultural land to other uses is likely to intensify.

The Regional Planning Commission, local municipalities and especially the Provincial Government are fully aware of the long term importance of agricultural land. Past investigations, such as the Alberta Land Use Forum, revealed that "...at some point in time, we would need all the agricultural land we have."[8] The investigations and public hearings of the Land Use Forum went beyond the confines of the Province and the Nation and speculated upon the world food situation. The final report, among other items, "Recommended [a] Structure to Assist Government in Carrying Out its Roles in Land Use".[9] However, there appears to have been a lack of Provincial response, particularly in relation to the agricultural land recommendations.

In summary, population and economic growth is difficult to envision especially within the present low growth scenario facing the Province. However, the maintenance of an agricultural land base remains an issue, whether or not growth occurs. Growth pressures merely amplify the issue. The long term maintenance of an agricultural land base is an issue affecting all future generations. The Provincial Government is fully aware of these issues, and it is anticipated that these 1983 public hearings of the E.C.A. will result in some clear and concise action by the Province.

---

[8] Alberta Land Use Forum, Report and Recommendations, January 1976, p. 149.

[9] Ibid., p. 50.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission has more than thirty years of experience directly related to agricultural land use issues. Practices, policies and plans have been adopted and implemented over the years, in an attempt to adequately address these issues. For the most part, this effort has been successful, especially in view of the Commission's limited jurisdiction and mandate.

However, issues affecting agricultural land extend beyond the influence of Regional Planning Commissions. Some of these broader issues relate to social, economic, environmental, political and land use factors that create pressure for the conversion of agricultural land to other uses. Others are related to the fact that the maintenance of an agricultural land base in the Province is not the sole responsibility of one government, but is a Provincial, Regional, Municipal as well as an individual responsibility. In order to address these initial conclusions, our first recommendation is that:

(1) A CONSISTENT STRATEGY TO MAINTAIN THE AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE IN ALBERTA SHOULD BE FORMULATED.

The strategy should be based on the recognition of agricultural land as a resource, with a long term commitment to its protection and management, rather than as a commodity which can be disposed of on the basis of short term needs or demands. As a result, this recommendation raises a number of related issues. Firstly, the question of who should be responsible for the formulation of this strategy must be addressed. The Commission believes that the Provincial Government is responsible for overall leadership but that Regional Planning Commissions, local municipalities and the public at large must be included as integral components in the initial design and eventual implementation of such a strat-

egy. The existing hierarchical organization of government in the Province, with its associated statutes and mandates, is more than adequate to formulate a province-wide strategy. Therefore, the second recommendation is that:

> ***(2) THE FORMULATION OF THE STRATEGY SHOULD BE INITIATED BY THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IN CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS, LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE.***

A second issue relates to what the strategy should attempt to accomplish. The Commission believes that a universally acceptable definition of high quality agricultural land should become part of the strategy and that this definition should be applicable to all levels of government, Regional Planning Commissions and the public at large. One approach is to tie the definition to information that is available. For example, the Province could define high quality agricultural land in accord with the Canada Land Inventory Maps that presently cover a large portion of the Province. The definition thus provided would be further refined by Regional Planning Commissions, local municipalities and, in some instances, by individuals, through the use of more detailed maps and information. Additional information sources could be provided by hiring professionals to study and map key areas and by using Municipal Farmland Assessment Information. Philosophical differences in the definition of high quality farmland would be minimized as changes in the definition would be tied to scientific facts and local conditions. Therefore, our third recommendation is that:

> ***(3) THE STRATEGY SHOULD INCLUDE A DEFINITION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND THAT IS APPLICABLE AT A PROVINCIAL SCALE AND SUBJECT TO FURTHER REFINEMENT AT REGIONAL AND MUNICIPAL LEVELS.***

Another issue arises from the above recommendation and addresses the general lack of detailed agricultural information in the Province. Lack of detailed soils information in key areas such as urban fringes, often leads to land use decisions that are based upon broad scale maps such as the C.L.I. Capability for Agriculture. These broad scale maps are frequently inadequate for detailed planning decisions. In addition, such decisions may be compounded further by insufficient information relating to agricultural economics, land use and social impacts. As a result, our fourth recommendation addresses the need for a rural information base in the Province. This recommendation is that:

> ***(4) THE STRATEGY SHOULD INCLUDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RURAL INFORMATION SYSTEM THAT WOULD INCLUDE SUCH TOPICS AS LAND USE, SOILS, SOCIAL IMPACTS AND AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS.***

A further issue relates more to the implementation of such a strategy and addresses public information and education. The Commission's experience indicates there is a general lack of knowledge and understanding about agricultural land in the Province. This lack has become increasingly evident when the longer term merits of this finite resource are discussed, especially from the viewpoint that agricultural land is a simple commodity. Therefore, the fifth recommendation is that:

> ***(5) THE STRATEGY SHOULD INCORPORATE A PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMME TO PROVIDE THE PEOPLE OF ALBERTA WITH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF PRESENT AND FUTURE ISSUES FACING AGRICULTURE.***

The final recommendations acknowledge the unique regions in the Province and the complexities associated with a province-wide strategy for agricultural land; and, outline the general direction and clarification that is necessary to initiate such a strategy. The recommendations are that:

(6) THE STRATEGY SHOULD OUTLINE A BROAD FRAMEWORK FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND THE PLANNING FOR NON-AGRICULTURAL LAND USE, RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENCES IN THE AGRICULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND LAND USE REQUIREMENTS OF DIFFERENT AREAS OF THE PROVINCE.

(7) THE STRATEGY SHOULD CLARIFY THE ROLES AND INTERRELATIONSHIPS AND PROVIDE CONSISTENT POLICY GUIDELINES FOR THE VARIOUS ACTORS INVOLVED, INCLUDING THE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSIONS, LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, INDIVIDUALS, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES.

REFERENCES

Alberta Land Use Forum (1976). Land Use Forum Report and Recommendations. January 1976.

Alberta Planning Board. Revised Guidelines for Regional Plan Preparation and Review. Edmonton. 1982.

Alberta Planning Board. Framework For Application of Regional Plan Guidelines. Edmonton. 1982.

Birch, Alfred. An Inventory of Changes of Alberta's Agricultural Land Base Between 1976 and 1980. Resource Economic Branch, Alberta Agriculture. Edmonton. 1982.

Edmonton District Planning Commission. Edmonton District Plan - Metropolitan Section. Edmonton District Planning Commission. Edmonton. 1958.

Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission. Draft Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan. Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission. 1982.

Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission. Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan. Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission. 1983.

Edmonton Regional Planning Commission. Draft Edmonton Regional Plan. Volumes 1 and 2. Edmonton Regional Planning Commission. 1979.

Edmonton Regional Planning Commission. Rural Land Use Policy - Position Paper No. 1. Edmonton Regional Planning Commission. Edmonton. 1975.

Edmonton Regional Planning Commission. Towards a Regional Land Use Policy - A Paper Prepared for Presentation to the Alberta Land Use Forum. Edmonton Regional Planning Commission. Edmonton. 1975.

Gordon, Mary. Agricultural Land and Land Use Planning In Alberta: A Review of Planning Legislation and Practices. Environment Council of Alberta. Edmonton. 1981.

Gordon, Mary. Options for Protecting Agricultural Land. Environment Council of Alberta. Edmonton. 1982.

Government of the Province of Alberta. Planning Act. Chapter P-9 Revised Statutes of Alberta. Queen's Printer. Edmonton. 1980.

REFERENCES, continued

Government of the Province of Alberta. Report and Decision Concerning the Edmonton Annexation Application. 1981.

Thompson, Peggy S. Maintaining and Expanding the Agricultural Land Base in Alberta Terms of Reference and Background Information. Environment Council of Alberta. Edmonton. 1982.

Thompson, Peggy S. Rural Subdivision in the Edmonton Battle River, Red Deer and Calgary Regional Planning Commissions, 1977-1979. Environment Council of Alberta. Edmonton. 1982.

APPENDIX A

LAND USE INFORMATION AND POPULATION STATISTICS

BV 340 33(½)

AREA IN ACRES OF COUNTRY RESIDENTIAL USE ON AGRICULTURAL LAND; C.L.I. 1-3: E.M.R.P.C. REGION

Rural Municipality	Pre 1960	1960-69	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	TOTAL
Sturgeon	-	720	80	200	-	160	360	80	320	40	240	200	640	-	3,040
Parkland	160	280	160	440	200	720	920	240	200	360	40	-	-	160	3,880
Strathcona	1,120	440	440	1,200	560	320	320	1,320	1,360	520	480	840	560	-	9,480
Leduc	80	560	240	-	640	-	240	160	400	-	80	-	440	80	2,920
TOTAL	1,360	2,000	920	1,840	1,400	1,200	1,840	1,800	2,280	920	840	1,040	1,640	240	19,320

NUMBER OF LOTS AND AREA IN ACRES CONVERTED TO COUNTRY RESIDENTIAL USE: E.M.R.P.C. REGION

Rural Municipality	Pre 1960	1960-69	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	TOTAL
Sturgeon	22[a] / 80	98 / 845	73 / 675	23 / 125	55 / 630	8 / 50	63 / 250	65 / 370	95 / 555	22 / 150	34 / 245	75 / 480	132 / 780	36 / 195	10 / 90	811 / 5520
Parkland	13 / 65	124 / 1210	240 / 1660	426 / 2490	158 / 785	399 / 2183	320 / 1700	226 / 1325	387 / 2190	214 / 1300	499 / 2650	140 / 570	355 / 1550	161 / 725	36 / 180	3698 / 20583
Strathcona	357 / 1460	264 / 2125	476 / 850	358 / 1630	169 / 920	218 / 1100	140 / 850	699 / 3730	443 / 2535	227 / 1080	411 / 2150	605 / 3270	279 / 1430	248 / 1120	40 / 280	4634 / 24550
Leduc	18 / 105	129 / 330	27 / 130	144 / 600	58 / 320	60 / 300	109 / 730	58 / 280	352 / 1350	246 / 1340	214 / 1148	75 / 490	323 / 955	165 / 750	201 / 740	2179 / 9568
TOTAL	410 / 1710	615 / 4510	516 / 3315	951 / 4845	440 / 2655	685 / 3633	632 / 3530	1048 / 5705	1277 / 6650	709 / 3870	1158 / 6193	895 / 4810	1089 / 4715	610 / 2790	287 / 1290	11322 / 60221

NOTE: An additional 484 lots totalling 1,765 acres were converted to country residential use, but are now located within the 1982 City of Edmonton boundaries.

[a] 22 lots / 80 acres

LAND AREA IN HECTARES FOR URBAN MUNICIPALITIES IN THE E.M.R.P.C. REGION, 1961-1983

	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1983
Beaumont[a]	-	-	260	260	260	263
Bon Accord[b]	-	80	80	80	200	200
Calmar	80	80	80	80	200	200
Devon	365	365	365	365	710	710
Edmonton	14,680	21,850	28,540	31,070	32,160	65,237
Fort Saskatchewan	780	920	1,180	1,310	3,290	3,290
Gibbons	100	100	100	160	730	795
Leduc	390	390	540	1,660	2,240	2,240
Legal	70	70	70	80	180	180
Morinville	90	90	230	420	750	1,118
New Sarepta[a]	-	-	75	90	270	270
Redwater	230	230	640	640	700	700
Sherwood Park[c]	-	-	-	-	-	1,550
St. Albert	1,290	1,560	1,560	1,980	3,650	3,560
Spruce Grove	90	150	580	730	1,960	1,960
Stony Plain	263	480	480	530	2,650	2,650
TOTAL	18,428	26,365	34,780	39,455	49,950	84,923

Source: E.M.R.P.C. Files and Statistics Canada.

Notes: [a] Not an urban municipality in 1961 and 1966.

[b] Not an urban municipality in 1961.

[c] Not an incorporated urban municipality, but boundaries identified for planning purposes in local plans and Regional Plans.

POPULATION GROWTH CAPACITY FOR URBAN MUNICIPALITIES, 1981[1]

Municipality	Vacant Subdivided		Reserve Gross Acres	Total Vacant Gross Acres	Population Growth Capacity 16 persons per Gross Acres[2]
	Net Acres	Gross Acres			
Edmonton[3]	N/A	N/A	7,220	N/A	192,130
Beaumont	100	130	182	312	4,992
Bon Accord	29	38	275	313	5,008
Calmar	47	61	563	624	9,984
Devon	59	77	210	287	4,592
Fort Saskatchewan	174	226	1,652	1,878	30,048
Gibbons	43	56	730	786	12,576
Leduc	163	212	2,189	2,401	38,416
Legal	60	78	292	370	5,920
Morinville	210	273	773	1,046	16,736
New Sarepta	7	9	363	372	5,952
Redwater	66	86	1,023	1,109	17,744
Sherwood Park[4]	21	27	4,160	4,187	66,992
Spruce Grove	128	166	1,940	2,106	33,696
St. Albert[5]	N/A	N/A	3,823	N/A	65,327
Stony Plain	164	213	3,158	3,371	53,936
TOTAL	N/A	N/A	28,553	N/A	564,049

Source: E.M.R.P.C. Files.

Footnotes:

[1] 1981 is the most recent year for which data are available. Development, zoning changes and municipal boundary changes in 1982 and 1983 are not accounted for in this table.

[2] It is assumed that 16 persons per gross acre is an average density for residential development. It is also assumed all areas under urban reserve and/or direct control districts are developable and will be used for residential or related uses. Given this latter assumption, estimates for population growth capacity are likely inflated.

[3] In 1981, the City of Edmonton had a vacant subdivided residential land supply which could accommodate 28,374 potential units. Using the 1981 Statistics Canada average of 2.7 persons per unit, the total growth capacity of vacant subdivided residential land is 76,610 persons. Estimates listed under "Reserve Gross Acres" include only vacant unsubdivided residential land in approved Area Structure Plan areas, which amounts to 7,220 acres. At 16 persons per gross acre, the growth capacity is 115,520 persons. The total growth capacity is 192,130.

[4] "Reserve Gross Acreage" estimates for Sherwood Park are derived from the County of Strathcona Land Use Bylaw.

[5] Estimates for St. Albert are for September, 1983. St. Albert has 422 residential lots approved but not registered, 201 lots registered and not serviced, and 586 lots registered and serviced; for a total of 1,209 lots. Using a St. Albert average of 3.44 people per lot, the growth capacity is 4,159 persons. The city also has 3,823 acres of vacant land with a potential for future urban uses. At 16 persons per gross acre, this area could potentially accommodate 61,168 persons. The total population growth capacity potential for St. Albert is 65,327 persons.

APPENDIX B

COMMENTS RECEIVED IN RESPONSE TO THE 1979 AND 1982 DRAFT REGIONAL PLANS REGARDING AGRICULTURE

COMMENTS RESPECTING THE PROPOSED EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLAN DRAFT - 1979

Introduction

A substantial number of the briefs presented during the public hearings on the 1979 Draft Regional Plan indicated a need to preserve good agricultural land and prevent fragmentation of farmland. They included statements on the need to:

(1) conserve areas of intensive productive farmland lower than C.L.I. Class 1, 2 and 3 agricultural capability;

(2) prevent urban encroachment (erosion) of the agricultural land base by urban expansion, country residential development and industrial growth;

(3) require increased densities for urban and industrial development;

(4) direct urban and industrial development to non-productive or unutilized lands;

(5) oppose strip mining of arable lands where alternatives exist; and,

(6) support a 160 acre minimum farm size (except for intensive agriculture).

Agricultural Land Preservation

A number of issues relating to preservation of agricultural lands were raised and support was voiced for policies aimed at the conservation of good farmland. There was concern that urban and industrial growth, country residential development, 80 acre splits, first-parcels-out and coal mining would be detrimental to the regional agricultural resource.

The agricultural land use policies stated that loss of prime agricultural land shall be minimized. "Prime" agricultural lands were defined as lands with a C.L.I. agricultural soils capability of 1, 2 or 3 OR lands with the potential for producing specialty and other crops or of supporting land-intensive agricultural operations. Prime agricultural land shall be conserved by encouraging infilling and higher densities in urban areas and by directing non-agricultural uses in rural areas to poorer soils.

An issue raised concerned the inclusion of an agricultural land use policy which provided a loophole that ran counter to all the good intentions to conserve agricultural land which were expressed in the other policies of the draft plan. The policy referred to stated that, "notwithstanding the provisions for subdivision of prime agricultural land in the previous policy, the Commission may approve an application for land use change or subdivision of

agricultural land, if there are highly exceptional or unusual circumstances". The suggestion was that such a situation should be handled through an amendment to the Plan.

Agricultural Viability

Concern was expressed about the preservation of farm viability. Some briefs suggested that the Plan may restrict future farm viability in that draft Regional Plan Policy considered 80 acres as a minimum size of a viable farm for non-intensive farming. A minimum size of 160 acres for a viable farm was favoured by most respondents.

Briefs mentioned the need to assure farmers that their land would remain in Agricultural Use and that agricultural land requirements will grow. In order to ensure that farmland would remain in agricultural use, the prime agricultural lands had been assigned to a farm conservation class in the Plan and the subdivision of Prime lands was restricted. As stated in policy, one parcel may be separated from a quarter section but it should not exceed 3 acres in size; unworkable parcels which are physically separated may be subdivided from the balance of the quarter section and intensive agricultural parcels may also be permitted.

Concern was raised that the nature conservation and outdoor recreation (NCOR) and shorelands policies in the plan may restrict locations for market gardening operations and diminish regional agricultural output. The Plan restricted agricultural pursuits in the 25 year return period flood plain in that only low intensity farming with a minimum investment in building was permitted. As well, only extensive agricultural uses were permitted in NCOR lands.

The difficulty encountered in attempting to define a viable farm was raised. The Plan made no attempt to determine what constitutes a viable farm. Instead, the Plan worked towards preserving of agricultural viability by trying to ensure that most of the Region's productive farmlands remained in agricultural use.

Concern was expressed that high land prices threaten farm viability by making the entering of farming more difficult. Land banking and levying a speculation tax were suggested as measures to control the problem. The agricultural land use policies did not deal with these control measures.

Land Use Conflicts

The need to prevent land use conflicts between agricultural operations and surrounding land uses was brought up. The primary concern was with the proximity of livestock operations to other uses which are incompatible.

Country Residential Land Use Policy specified that land shall not be allocated to country residential use within 0.5 miles of the boundary of land containing a livestock feeding lot. There was concern that conflicts may be caused when a farmer wished to intensify his operation or start a livestock operation. It was felt that the farmer should have the right to do so despite adjacent country residential use. It was also felt that acreage owners should have the right to voice their opinions on any change.

Different views were presented respecting land use priorities for country residential development. Some briefs stated that, regardless of the C.L.I. capability of soils, country residential development should not be permitted in predominantly agricultural areas, should receive low priority because land used for country residential is lost to all other potential uses, is an inefficient use of land, promotes land use conflict with the agricultural community and brings with it substantial costs to the municipality.

Other briefs called for greater recognition for country residential development as a desirable land use and some briefs requested that considerably more land be designated for this use.

It was also stated in some briefs that country residential should not be permitted in predominantly agricultural areas, regardless of the C.L.I. capability of the soils. The Plan allowed country residential development in areas of prime agricultural capability in cases:

(1) where farmstead separation parcels may be allowed, as described in the Agricultural Land Use Policy Section;

(2) where workable farm parcels exist, as described in the Agricultural Land Use Policy Section. Country residence use may be permitted on such parcels by the subdivision approving authority;

(3) where highly exceptional or unusual circumstances exist, as described in the Agricultural Land Use Policy Section; and

(4) where a highly unique country residential attraction exists, as a result of proximity to a lake or stream, to a ravine or major river valley, and/or highly scenic land.

Such areas shall be designated in the Regional Plan and in statutory plans.

The Plan directed country residential development to areas of non-prime agricultural capability which are also suited to country residential use. As well, in part to prevent fragmentation of agricultural lands, the Plan specified that country residential land use shall be concentrated as much as possible in order to minimize servicing costs and reduce the number of potential land use conflicts.

COMMENTS RESPECTING THE PROPOSED EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL DRAFT PLAN - 1982

Introduction

Generally, the municipal and non-municipal briefs that addressed the agricultural land use issue during the 1982 Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan public hearings supported the philosophy of the policies, which is to preserve the high quality agricultural land for agricultural production. Concerns that were raised on this issue included:

(1) method of identification and preservation of agricultural land;

(2) ways of determining the viability of agriculture in the Region and methods to maintain that viability; and

(3) ensuring that land use conflicts between agriculture and other uses are adequately addressed.

Preservation of Agricultural Land

Although there was general agreement with the agricultural land preservation policies of the Proposed Regional Plan some concern was expressed regarding the definition of "prime agricultural land". The Proposed Regional Plan defined "prime agricultural land" as:

(1) land with a C.L.I. soil capability rating for agriculture of Classes 1 and 2, and those lands rated as Class 3 which exhibit good agricultural productivity by having a farmland assessment rating of 41 percent or higher; and/or

(2) land with the potential for producing specialty and other crops, or for supporting land-intensive agricultural operations, none of which are considered in the C.L.I. agricultural capability classification scheme.

The common concerns with the definition were:

(1) the lack of clarity as to who would identify the prime agricultural land; and

(2) the ambiguity of the second part of the definition.

In addition it was suggested that the Proposed Regional Plan policies may limit the discretion of local municipalities to interpret the definition by requiring <u>all</u> lands that fall within the definition to be preserved. On the other hand some briefs suggested that the definition of "prime agricultural land" did not extend far enough and should be expanded to include additional lands in the region.

In regards to agricultural land within urban municipalities, concern was expressed that the Proposed Regional Plan was requiring the urban municipalities to preserve the "prime agricultural land". It was suggested that Regional Plan policy should very clearly state that agricultural land should be protected until such time as the land is required for urban development.

Agricultural Viability

As with agricultural land preservation, the principle of maintaining agricultural viability in the region was supported by all briefs. However, concerns were expressed on specific aspects of this issue. Some briefs suggested that clarification was required as to the meaning of agricultural viability. There was disagreement with the Plan policy, which stated that 160 acres was an appropriate minimum parcel size for the region. Concern was also expressed regarding the 80 acre exception to the policy. It was suggested that such an exception would be detrimental to maintaining agricultural viability. The 80 acre exception policy was formulated in the Plan to reflect the existing situation in the four rural municipalities. As none of the four municipalities took exception to this policy, it is assumed that they would disagree with the suggestion that the parcel size should be increased.

Land Use Conflicts

The main land use conflict concern expressed related to the conflict between country residential land use and agricultural land use. Most briefs suggested that Regional Plan policy adequately addressed this issue.

Points that were raised regarding other aspects of the land use conflict issue included:

(1) the Plan should not completely restrict non-agricultural uses in agricultural areas;

(2) restrictions should be placed on intensive livestock operations only if they are an environmental hazard or located in an area identified for future urban use; and

(3) the Plan policies are not clear on the use of "prime agricultural land" in rural municipalities for industrial use.

Note: All of the points raised on agricultural land use during the public hearings on the Proposed Regional Plan were considered before the plan was revised and adopted by the Commission on September 7, 1983 as the Proposed Regional Plan. Very little concern was expressed on the agricultural policies of the Proposed Regional Plan when it was circulated for review and comment.

APPENDIX C

PROPOSED REGIONAL PLAN POLICIES RELATED TO AGRICULTURAL LAND USE
(extracted from the Proposed Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan, as adopted by the E.M.R.P.C. September 7, 1983)

PART III: REGIONAL PLAN OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

REGIONAL GROWTH MANAGEMENT

1.0 Urban Settlement and Land Use

OBJECTIVES:

(3) TO PROVIDE FOR THE PLANNED EXPANSION OF URBAN LAND USE, WHILE AVOIDING THE PREMATURE CONVERSION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND.

POLICIES:

Regional Settlement Pattern

1.1 Urban growth shall be accommodated only in existing urban municipalities and Sherwood Park.

Use of Urban Land

1.2 Urban municipalities shall, in their General Municipal Plans and Land Use Bylaws, identify and protect the following regionally significant land uses, in accord with the provisions of this Plan:

(a) servicing and transportation facilities and corridors;

(b) environmentally sensitive areas, and other areas that present significant limitations to development (See Policy 7.1);

(c) open space and recreational features such as stream valleys and major parks;

(d) heavy industrial areas;

(e) extractive resource areas; and

(f) better agricultural land until such time as the land is required for urban development (See Policy 5.2).

2.0 Fringe Area Planning

OBJECTIVES:

(2) TO PROVIDE FOR THE RATIONAL CONVERSION OF LAND FROM LOW INTENSITY TO HIGH INTENSITY USES.

POLICIES:

Fringe Area Planning Measures

2.3 A Joint General Municipal Plan and/or a Land Use Bylaw pursuant to a Joint General Municipal Plan should provide for uses which:

(a) are consistent with the growth management framework and policies of this Plan;

(b) will identify and protect potential urban expansion areas for future urban use;

(c) are part of a planned expansion of an existing land use;

(d) avoid the premature conversion of agricultural land;

(e) will allow the development of planned transportation and utility corridors;

(f) will recognize environmentally sensitive areas and open space lands used for park and recreation areas; and

(g) will provide for compatible land uses on surrounding lands.

3.0 Rural Settlement and Land Use

OBJECTIVES:

(1) TO ENSURE THAT RURAL RESIDENTIAL LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT TAKES PLACE IN A PLANNED FRAMEWORK WITHOUT JEOPARDIZING THE PRESENT AND FUTURE USE OF THE REGION'S AGRICULTURAL LAND AND OTHER VALUABLE NATURAL RESOURCES, AND WITHOUT LIMITING THE OPTIONS FOR FUTURE URBAN EXPANSION.

POLICIES:

Hamlets

3.2 Rural municipalities, in their General Municipal Plans and Land Use Bylaws, shall limit hamlet growth to infilling within the existing built-up area or the planning area established pursuant to Policy 3.1. Minor expansion of hamlets may be permitted by the municipality using the following criteria:

(a) the increase in the number of residents should not change the type or character of the hamlet and is consistent with the hamlet's local service role;

(b) the expansion is not on better agricultural land, or on extractive resource areas;

(c) adequate infrastructure and other basic services are available or will be provided; and

(d) an area structure plan has been adopted for the expansion area.

Multiple Parcel Country Residential Land Use

3.3 Rural municipalities shall, in their General Municipal Plans and Land Use Bylaws, direct multiple parcel country residential land use away from:

(a) urban municipalities, in accord with Policy 3.4;

(b) better agricultural land;

(c) wildlife habitat areas;

(d) environmentally sensitive areas;

(e) extractive resource areas; and

(f) heavy industrial areas.

3.6 Rural municipalities should, in their General Municipal Plans and/or Land Use Bylaws:

(a) identify locations for future multiple parcel country residential land use;

(b) allow for multiple parcel country residential land use to infill or build on existing concentrations;

(c) require the preparation of an area structure plan where substantial multiple parcel country residential development is anticipated;

(d) provide for adequate separation between multiple parcel country residential land use and:

(i) odor causing, intensive agricultural activities;

(ii) landfill sites, sewage treatment plants and sewage lagoons;

(iii) highways, airports and pipeline and powerline transmission corridors; and

(iv) any other noxious or dangerous facility such as a sour gas facility or a transportation facility or designated route carrying dangerous goods;

and

(e) establish a minimum parcel size for multiple parcel country residential land use based on:

(i) environmental constraints;

(ii) the provision of appropriate water and sewer services; and

(iii) the need to maintain the rural character of the area.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

5.0 Agriculture

OBJECTIVES:

(1) TO ENSURE THAT AGRICULTURE REMAINS AN INTEGRAL AND VIABLE COMPONENT OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FABRIC OF THE REGION.

(2) TO CONSERVE AGRICULTURAL LAND FOR CONTINUED AGRICULTURAL USE.

(3) TO DISCOURAGE THE UNWARRANTED FRAGMENTATION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND.

(4) TO MINIMIZE CONFLICT BETWEEN VIABLE AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS AND NON-AGRICULTURAL LAND USES.

POLICIES:

Agricultural Land Protection

5.1 Rural municipalities shall, in their General Municipal Plans and/or Land Use Bylaws, identify and protect better agricultural land.

5.2 Municipalities shall, in their General Municipal Plans and Land Use Bylaws, limit non-agricultural land uses on better agricultural land. Exceptions may be permitted when:

(a) no alternative location is reasonably available;

(b) the minimum land area required for development is used; and

(c) measures are taken to minimize conflicts with agriculture.

See Policy 1.2(f).

Subdivision of Agricultural Land

5.3 Subdivision approving authorities shall prohibit multiple parcel country residential subdivisions on better agricultural land, except where such subdivision consists of minor infilling of existing country residential areas.

5.4 A minimum parcel size of 64 ha (160 acres) more or less shall be maintained on better agricultural land. The following exceptions may be permitted:

(a) a minimum parcel size of 32 ha (80 acres) more or less, if permitted in a General Municipal Plan or Land Use Bylaw;

or

(b) the separation of the first residential parcel without a developed residence, if permitted in a General Municipal Plan or Land Use Bylaw;

or

(c) the separation of the first residential parcel with a developed residence;

and/or

(d) the separation of physically severed parcels where, in the opinion of the subdivision approving authority, the parcel(s) is rendered unworkable for agricultural purposes. Further subdivision of physically severed parcels for country residential use should not be permitted on better agricultural land.

Intensive Agriculture

5.5 Municipalities may provide, in their General Municipal Plans and Land Use Bylaws, for the separation of intensive agricultural parcels from an agricultural quarter section where the following conditions have been met:

(a) the applicant provides a written description of the proposed use and a statement of its viability in the proposed location; and

(b) the proposal has been referred to the appropriate agencies for review.

5.6 Municipalities should, in their General Municipal Plans or Land Use Bylaws, provide for measures to minimize conflict between intensive agricultural activities and other land uses.

6.0 Extractive Resource Utilization

POLICIES:

Extractive Resource Development

6.3 Municipalities should, in their General Municipal Plans and Land Use Bylaws, provide for reclamation procedures which will:

(a) identify measures to reduce the negative impacts on existing land uses;

(b) ensure the preparation of a reclamation plan to achieve the best and most suitable reclamation of the disturbed lands; and

(c) ensure that where extractive resource operations are permitted on better agricultural land, the land will be reclaimed to an agricultural land capability comparable to or greater than that existing prior to resource extraction.

9.0 Transportation

POLICIES:

Multi-use Corridors

9.5 Municipalities should work with the Commission, the provincial government and utility operators and/or authorities in the planning of an integrated transportation and utility system and in the protection and implementation of multi-use corridors so as to:

(a) ensure compatibility with adjacent land uses;

(b) facilitate future transportation and utility improvements and expansions;

(c) minimize the consumption and fragmentation of agricultural land; and

(d) protect recreational, ecological, historical and cultural resources of regional significance.

10.0 Public Utilities

POLICIES:

10.1 Municipalities should plan for public utilities so as to:

(a) avoid better agricultural land and environmentally sensitive areas;

(b) avoid conflict with sensitive land uses;

(c) avoid pollution of groundwater supplies and minimize disruption to natural drainage courses; and

(d) provide for the rehabilitation of closed sanitary landfill sites, or other surface disturbed areas.

11.0 Energy Utilities

POLICIES:

11.2 Municipalities should consider the following planning criteria for the establishment of pipeline and powerline rights-of-way or energy utility corridors. New lines or expansions should:

(a) locate in, or parallel to, established multi-use corridors;

(b) respect the topography, and the pattern of land use;

(c) be used as open space or as buffers between incompatible land uses;

(d) follow quarter section lines and avoid diagonal routes, wherever possible;

(e) avoid environmentally sensitive areas;

(f) avoid better agricultural land, areas of unique recreational or aesthetic importance, and areas with significant historical or cultural attributes; and

(g) be otherwise routed to minimize conflict with urban growth and maximize safety in corridor operations.